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THE ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PROTECTION OF BIRDS

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THE BIRDS IN Your garden

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THE BIRDS IN YOUR GARDEN

Cover photographs by Laurie Campbell – robin, & Eric Crichton (Bruce Coleman Ltd) – garden.
◀ Chaffich by Roger Wilmshurst (RSPB).
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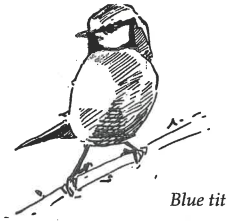
Revised 2001

A garden sanctuary



Blue tit

N G Blake (Bruce Coleman Ltd)

Everyone who has a garden – from an ivy-covered backyard to a country orchard – has a potential home for an amazing variety of animals and plants – a nature reserve on your doorstep!

C H Gomersall (RSPB)

▲ Robins (top) and blackbirds are common visitors to gardens

Perhaps the most compelling and conspicuous occupants are the birds that feed, shelter and raise their young in the protection of our gardens. At a time when even familiar species of birds are declining due to dramatic changes in our countryside, gardens are an increasingly vital refuge for birds. Your garden is one of several million links in the vast network of man-made countryside on which so much of our wildlife now depends.

There are many ways to improve your patch for birds. Some, such as putting out food in the winter, are very easy. Others, such as growing shrubs to attract butterflies and birds, need more planning. This booklet gives you a few ideas and shows you how to recognise the birds in your garden. Any effort you make will be rewarded many times over by discovering the fascinating animals and plants that are waiting to live in your garden if you encourage them in.

Starling

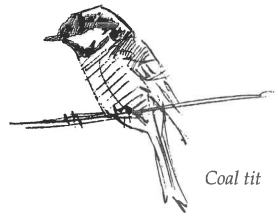
Feeding birds

The quickest and easiest way to see birds in your garden is to put out food for them through the winter. This is when natural food becomes scarce and many birds depend on the supplies put out for them in gardens. Over 100 different sorts of bird are known to visit gardens for food in winter. The number that you see will depend on where you live, but will probably be between five and 50 different species.

Mark Hamblin

C H Gomersall (RSPB)

Fieldfares (top) and starlings appreciate apples in cold weather ▸



Coal tit

When to feed birds

Winter is the most important time for feeding birds when their natural food source is hard to find. You may provide appropriate food regularly throughout the year if you wish.

Autumn and winter

Once you have started feeding, do not stop halfway through the winter. The food you put out becomes steadily more important as the winter progresses as seeds, fruit and insects become harder to find. Blackbirds, thrushes and robins benefit from apples and pears cut in half, particularly when the ground is hard.

R Glover (RSPB)

▲ Gardens can be made more attractive to birds by the addition of a regular supply of food and water

Kim Taylor (Bruce Coleman Ltd)

Many birds are creatures of habit and will make a special visit to your birdtable once they learn there is food there. When the weather is really bad, a wasted journey to your empty birdtable will make life even harder for them.

Birds use up their stores of food very quickly, turning it into energy to keep warm.

Try to put out food twice daily, in the early morning and early afternoon.

Spring and summer

Feeding between the end of April and early October may help birds survive. Do not use peanuts unless they are in a mesh container, from which only the smallest pieces can be taken to prevent baby birds choking. Whenever feeding peanuts to birds, choose only good quality stock from a reputable supplier, and guarateed to be aflatoxin free. Aflatoxin is a fungus, which if present in peanuts, can kill the birds that eat them. Fatty foods may also cause problems for baby birds.

During a drought you can help blackbirds and thrushes by putting out soft food such as fruit and grated cheese.

How to feed birds

Using a birdtable is probably the best way to feed birds – it gives you a clear view and provides the birds with some protection.

From your birdtable, above a window or from a tree you can hang nut baskets, seed hoppers, half coconuts (hung upside-down so rain water does not collect in them), and tit bells (eg plastic cup hung upside-down and filled with fat, cheese etc). They attract greenfinches, house sparrows and tits which you can watch performing their acrobatics.

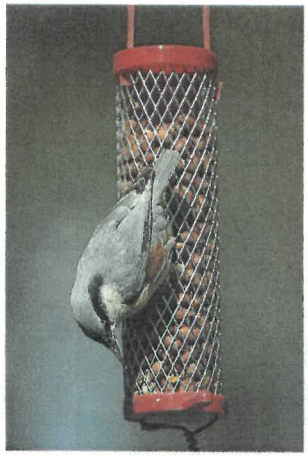
Ready-made birdtables and feeders are sold through the RSPB gift catalogue.

Fill the holes and cracks of a post or a suspended log with fatty food such as suet for birds such as nuthatches and woodpeckers.

If you put food such as apples and bread on the ground, space it out in different places. This will reduce competition between birds. If there is snow on the ground, clear a small area where you are putting the food.

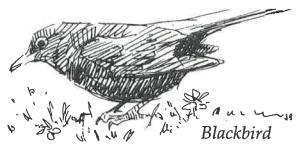
Stephen Dalton (NHPA)

▲A birdtable will attract many species of birds



M K Walker (RSPB)

▲You may be lucky enough to attract a nuthatch to your feeder



Blackbird

Chris Gomerscall (RSPB Images)

▲ Blackbirds love windfall fruit

Special supplies

There is a variety of specially prepared bird foods available. These include everything from bird seed mixture to mealworms which attract insect-eating birds such as pied wagtails.

Jay

What food to provide

There is no mystery about feeding birds - all sorts of kitchen scraps make a welcome meal (see below).

A couple of golden rules to remember are: Never put out dessicated coconut as this may swell up inside the bird's stomach and moisten very dry bread, and never put out salted foods. By trying a variety of foods you will soon learn the preferences of diffferent birds

Cheese	Fresh coconut
Cooked potato in any form	Mealworms
Dry porridge oats	Nuts
Fruit	Moistened bread
Melon seeds	Suet
Raisins	Sunflower seeds
Stale cake	Uncooked pastry
Sultanas	
Chopped bacon rind	
Currants	

Water

Birds need water - even in winter. They need it for drinking and for bathing – to keep their feathers in good condition to insulate themselves during the long, cold winter nights. Seed-eaters in particular need to drink plenty of water as this is lacking in their diet. Other birds, such as blue tits, may drink more in winter because their dry winter food does not provide them with as much water as their summer fare of juicy caterpillars.

A shallow dish or tray, or a larger container such as an inverted dustbin lid, is suitable for putting out water. You could make a more permanent water hole by digging a shallow scrape in a flower bed and lining it with plastic held down with stones. Ideally, a pond will provide water for drinking and bathing all year round and will attract many interesting sorts of wildlife to your garden (see page 26). Always remember to break ice on water baths in hard weather.

Ground feeders

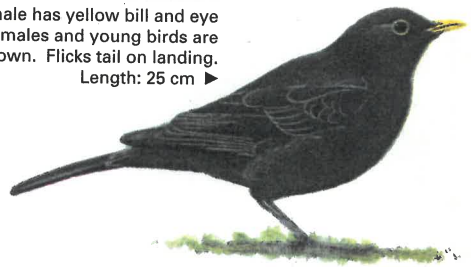
THESE BIRDS USUALLY FEED ON THE GROUND BUT SOME, SUCH AS CHAFFINCHES AND ROBINS, WILL ALSO FEED ON SHRUBS AND TREES. IN WINTER YOU SHOULD REMEMBER TO PUT SOME FOOD ON YOUR LAWN OR PATH FOR THESE BIRDS.

what's that bird?

Here are most of the birds you are likely to see in your garden, with hints on how to recognise them. (Not drawn to scale.)

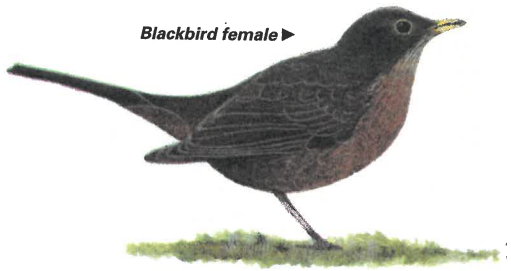
Song thrush
Brown with spotted breast. Smaller than mistle thrush and no white in tail. Length: 23 cm ▶

Blackbird
Black male has yellow bill and eye ring. Females and young birds are brown. Flicks tail on landing. Length: 25 cm ▶



Mistle thrush
Larger and greyer than song thrush. Boldly spotted breast, white tail tips. Length: 27 cm ▶

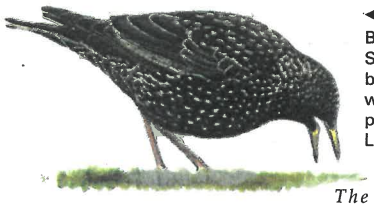
Blackbird female ▶



Blackbird
Rich mellow song delivered from roof-tops and trees. ▶

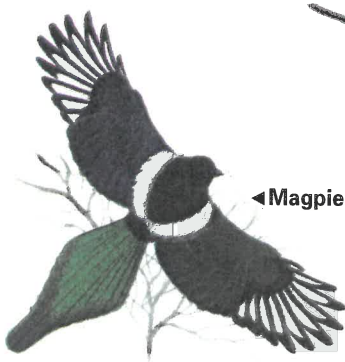
▲Song thrush
Musical song - each phrase repeated.

Mistle thrush
Sings loudly from the tops of trees in all weather. ▶



◀Starling
Blackish glossy plumage. Short-tailed and smaller than blackbird. Speckled white in winter. Waddling gait. Short pointed shape in flight. Length: 22 cm

▲Starling
Jumbled song with head turning and wing flapping. Good mimic, but cackle at end of phrase aids identification.



◀Magpie

◀Magpie
Large pied bird with very long tail. Harsh chattering call. Length: 46 cm

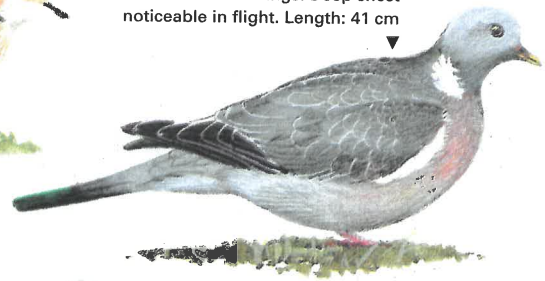
◀Jay
Striking colours. May breed in larger gardens. Often in small groups. Length: 34 cm

◀Jay
White rump noticeable in flight.

Collared dove
In flight, dark-tipped wings and black and white tail are conspicuous. Flicking wing action. Length: 32 cm ▶

◀Woodpigeon

Woodpigeon
Large pigeon with white collar, plum coloured breast and white marks on wings. Takes off with a clatter of wings. Deep chest noticeable in flight. Length: 41 cm ▼



Collared dove ▶
Pale grey/buff colour with black collar.

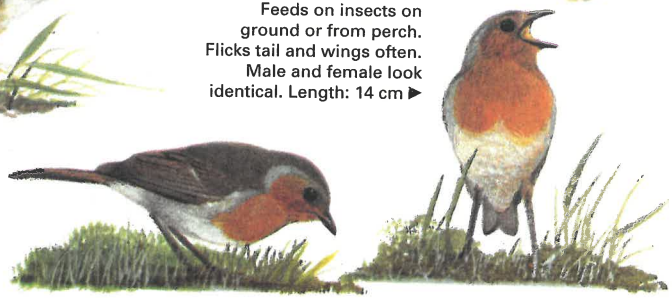
Tree sparrow
More likely to be seen in country gardens. All-chestnut crown, white collar and black spot on cheek distinguish it from house sparrow. Sexes look alike. Length: 14.5 cm ▼

▲ Smaller and neater than house sparrow with small black bib.

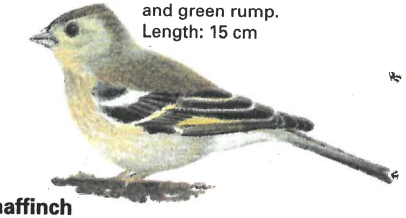
House sparrow
Male often much scruffier looking than this. Usually feeds on the ground in groups. Noisy and common. Length: 14.5 cm ▼

Dunnock
Delicate, shy bird that creeps along the ground for food - usually under cover. Grey head and streaky back. Length: 14.5 cm ▼

Robin
Robins are territorial, even in winter, and sing loudly from perches to keep out rivals. Turns and tilts head when feeding on the ground. ▶



◀ Chaffinch
Conspicuous double white wing bar distinguishes it from other finches. White outer tail feathers and green rump. Length: 15 cm



▲ Chaffinch
Thick seed-eating bill. Searches for food in a series of short jerky hops. Female duller than male.

Male chaffinch

◀ House sparrow
Female house sparrow is dull-coloured.

Robin
Feeds on insects on ground or from perch. Flicks tail and wings often. Male and female look identical. Length: 14 cm ▶

Shrubs and trees

MOST OF THESE BIRDS FEED OFF THE GROUND, ON TREE TRUNKS, IN SHRUBS OR UNDERGROWTH. MEMBERS OF THE TIT FAMILY MOVE ACROBATICALLY IN TREES AND SHRUBS SEARCHING FOR INSECTS. FINCHES EAT MAINLY SEEDS AND WILL BE ATTRACTED TO A WILD PATCH IN YOUR GARDEN.

◀ Nuthatch
Dumpy, short-tailed bird that creeps along tree trunks and branches searching for insects. Will visit birdtables. Bold black stripe through eye. Length: 14 cm

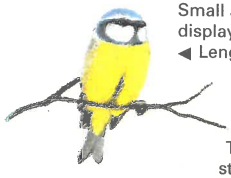
Nuthatches can climb down trees as well as up.

▲ Great tit
Largest tit with bold black and white head. Common visitor to birdtables. Will often feed on the ground. Length: 14 cm

Notice broad black band on belly.

◀ Blue tit ▼

Blue tit
One of our best known garden visitors. Visits trees, shrubs and birdtables. Small and acrobatic. Spring courtship display - flies from perch to perch.
◀ Length: 11.5 cm



▲ Treecreeper
Like nuthatch, works over tree bark looking for insects, but is much shyer. Creeps up trees, never down, looking rather mouse-like. Curved, thin bill. Length: 12.5 cm

Goldcrest ▶
Tiny green/brown bird with bright yellow stripe on top of head. Agile feeder among leaves, searching for insects, such as ▼ greenflies. Length: 9 cm

▲ Coal tit
Distinguished by small size, white patch on the back of the neck and white wingbars. Eats insects and seeds. Prefers conifers. Length: 11 cm

Willow tit
Dull black crown and chin. Broad white cheeks obvious from behind. ◀

Pale patch on wings distinguishes it from marsh tit, but separating the two species is very difficult and best done on voice. Length: 11.5 cm

Wren
Tiny, chestnut brown bird with scolding call and loud, strident song. Moves mouse-like through undergrowth searching for insects. Length: 9.5 cm ▼

▲ **Linnet**
Male has red forehead and variable red on breast. Female lacks red. Normally calls when flying. Feeds on weed seeds and insects. Length: 13.5 cm

▲ **Linnet**

Linnet has white on wings and tail in flight.

▲ **Redpoll**
Fond of seeds of trees such as birch and willow. Bright red forehead and black chin, but only male has pink on breast. Length: 12.5 cm

▲ **Great spotted woodpecker**
Boldly pied. Male has red patch on back of crown. May be heard drumming in spring - hammering with its bill on a tree trunk or branch. Length: 22 cm

◄ **Siskin**
Small acrobatic seed eater. Male is yellow/green with black bib and crown, and yellow wingbars. Female has duller plumage. Noticeably forked tail.

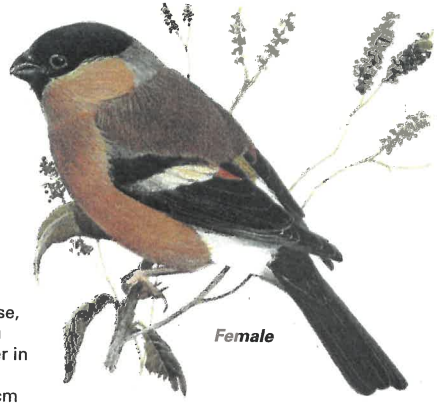
Now regularly visit birdtables and feeders. Length: 12 cm

Bullfinch
Bright white rump shows in flight.

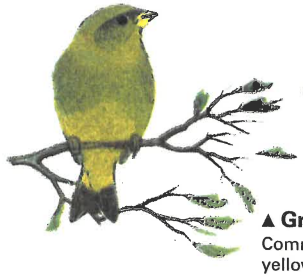
Male

Female

▲ **Bullfinch**
Very bright and easy to recognise, but shy and usually seen flitting between trees. Pink breast duller in female. Seen in pairs feeding in trees or on ground. Length: 15 cm



Female

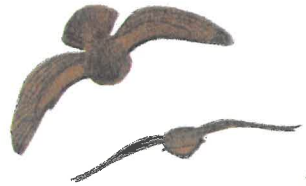


▲ **Greenfinch**
Common garden visitor. Stout bill, yellow on wings and tail. Female is duller green than male. Long wings and short tail are noticeable in flight. Length: 14.5 cm

Male

Female greenfinches

▲ **Goldfinch**
Red face and yellow wingbars conspicuous. Feeds on seeds of thistle, teasel and other weeds. Distinctive tinkling call, often heard when birds are flying. Length: 12 cm



◄ **Tawny owl** ▲
Hunts at night, flight silent. Large round head, broad rounded wings. Well-known hooting and sharp 'ke-wick' calls. Nests in hollow trees and sometimes in buildings. Length: 38 cm

By water

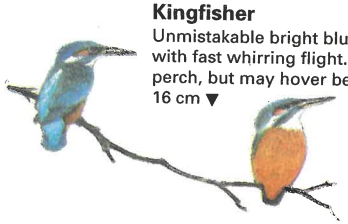
These birds are more likely to be seen in a garden which has a pond or running water. Except for the pied wagtail, they are more likely to be seen in winter.

◄Grey heron
Huge grey bird that has started to visit ponds in gardens to take the fish. Flies with slow powerful wingbeats and neck retracted. Length: 94 cm

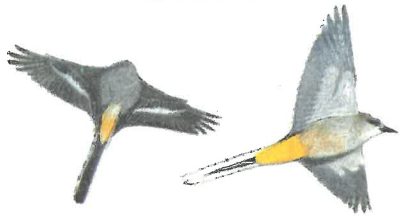
◄Pied wagtail
Black, white and grey with long, bobbing tail. Feeds on ground, often near water. Nests in holes, ivy, walls and sheds. Length: 18 cm

▲Moorhen
Not usually a garden bird, but may visit ponds and feeding areas in winter. Note red bill and flicking white undertail. Length: 33 cm

▼Grey wagtail
Grey above and bright yellow below. Very long black tail with white outer feathers. Catches insects near water and may visit garden ponds in winter. Length: 18 cm

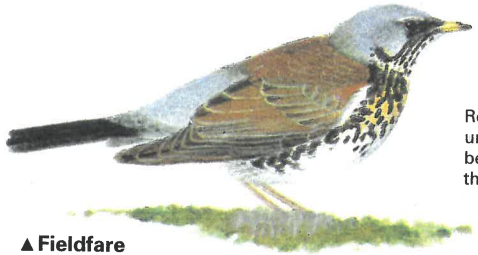


Kingfisher
Unmistakable bright blue and orange bird with fast whirring flight. Usually fishes from perch, but may hover before diving. Length: 16 cm ▼

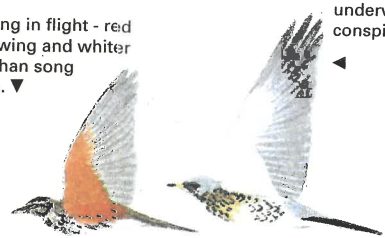


Winter visitors

There are some birds that only visit the British Isles in winter, such as redwings and fieldfares. Others, such as reed buntings, are resident all year round but only venture into gardens in winter when food becomes scarce.



▲Fieldfare
Grey head and rump, and black tail. May visit gardens in severe winter weather to feed on berries. Larger than redwing. Length: 26 cm



Redwing in flight - red underwing and whiter belly than song thrush. ▼

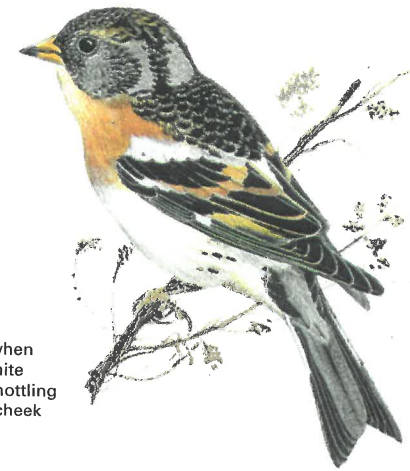
Fieldfare in flight - the white underwing is conspicuous. ◄

▲Redwing
Small thrush with prominent pale stripe above eye and red flanks. Often seen in flocks with fieldfares, but will visit gardens in severe weather. Length: 21 cm

▲Brambling
Bright white rump distinguishes this finch from the more common chaffinch. Grey nape to neck and orange shoulders. Length: 14.5 cm

▲Male brambling in winter plumage more variegated above than chaffinch.

Male



White outer tail feathers obvious in flight.

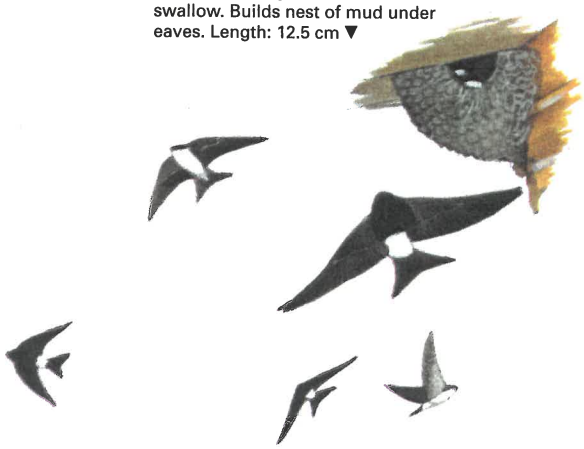
▲Reed bunting
Present all year, but usually only ventures into gardens in winter when food is scarce. Black head and white collar of male hidden by brown mottling in winter. Female has distinctive cheek pattern. Length: 15.5 cm

Summer visitors

ALL THESE BIRDS ARE SUMMER VISITORS TO THE UK. LOOK OUT FOR THEM ARRIVING FROM MARCH ONWARDS.

Swift
Dark with very long, crescent-shaped wings. Short forked tail. Often seen flying high in built up areas. Nests in roofs and towers. Characteristic screaming call. Arrives from May. Length: 16 cm ▶

House martin
Bright white belly and rump, and short tail distinguish it from swallow. Builds nest of mud under eaves. Length: 12.5 cm ▼



▲ Garden warbler
Plump, brownish bird, larger than willow warbler or chiffchaff. Length: 14 cm

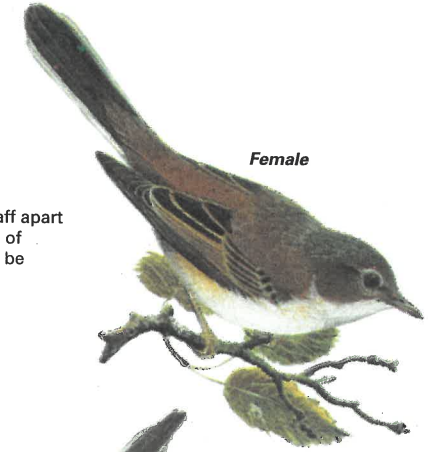
Swallow
Long forked tail and creamy underparts distinguish it from house martin. Red throat patch. Length: 19 cm ▼

Usually flies fast and low over lawns, fields and water, feeding on airborne insects. ▼

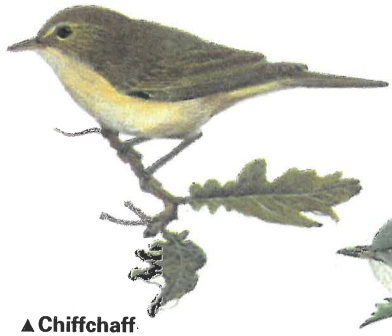
▲ Spotted flycatcher
Grey-brown with streaked head and breast. Perches upright and darts out for passing insects. Sometimes nests in gardens - in buildings, trees or among creepers. Length: 14 cm

Blackcap
Becoming a more common visitor to birdtables in winter. Recognised by crown colour – black in male, brown in female. Male sings hidden in foliage. Usually seen when flying from tree to tree, otherwise remains in thick cover. Length: 14 cm ▶

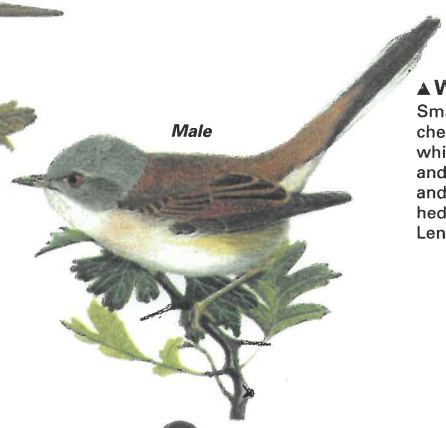
◀ Willow warbler
Difficult to tell from chiffchaff apart from song which is a series of descending notes. Tends to be brighter than chiffchaff. Length: 11 cm



Female

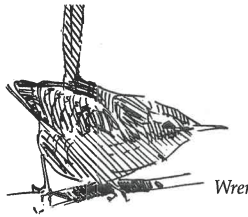


▲ Chiffchaff
Small, slim bird. Olive brown above, paler below. Wings and tail constantly flick while searching for insects. A summer visitor, but small numbers also overwinter. Length: 11 cm



Male

▲ Whitethroat
Small with grey head, chestnut back, pale belly and white throat. Female duller and lacks grey head. Darts in and out of undergrowth and hedges with cocked tail. Length: 14 cm



Wren

Gardening for birds

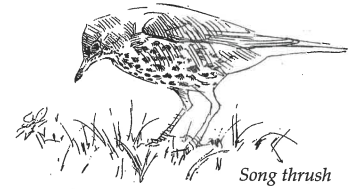
Jay

Roger Wilmshurst (RSPB)

The key to a garden that is both beautiful and a refuge for a rich variety of wildlife is diversity. This means providing as many different sorts of plants and cover as possible – open areas of lawn, thick shrubs, a compost heap, well covered flower beds, a hedge, a pond. Each will be the preferred place for a particular insect, bird or other animal to feed, shelter or raise young.

Blue tit

George McCarthy (RSPB)



Song thrush

Most of the plants or shrubs in your garden are shelter and food for several sorts of insects. These different insects will attract different kinds of birds. So, the more types of plants in your garden, the more insects – and so birds – there will be.

Here are some ideas to turn your garden into a wildlife refuge.

Your compost heap

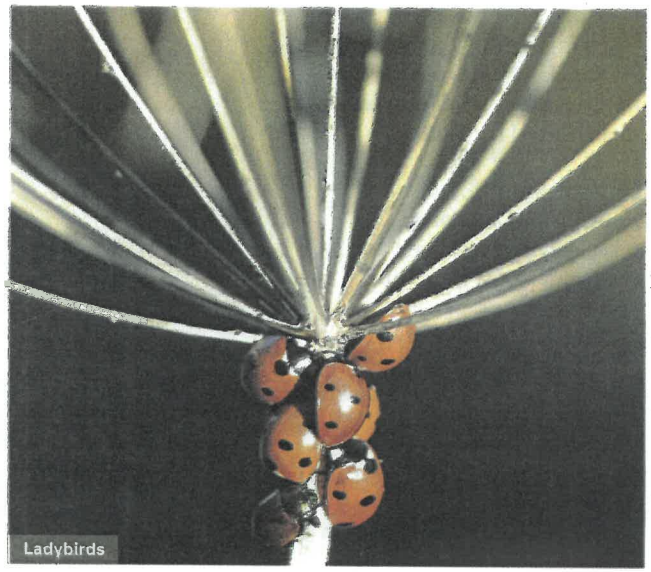
Inside your compost heap, small animals and fungi feed on vegetable matter, speeding up the recycling process. A compost heap is a good way of recycling the nutrients in your garden, and in winter it provides a frost-free area where birds can find insects and seeds.

Wildflowers not weeds

Look again at the plants that you usually pull up as weeds. Many of them are beautiful wildflowers and very important foodplants for butterflies and other insects. Thistles produce seeds that are a favourite food of the colourful goldfinch. A clump of rosebay willowherb left alongside a hedge will provide food and shelter for all sorts of insects.

Composting kitchen scraps

Scott Camazine (Oxford Scientific Films)



Ladybirds

David Houghton (Oxford Scientific Films)

Swift

Buddleia

Mike Birkead (Oxford Scientific Films)

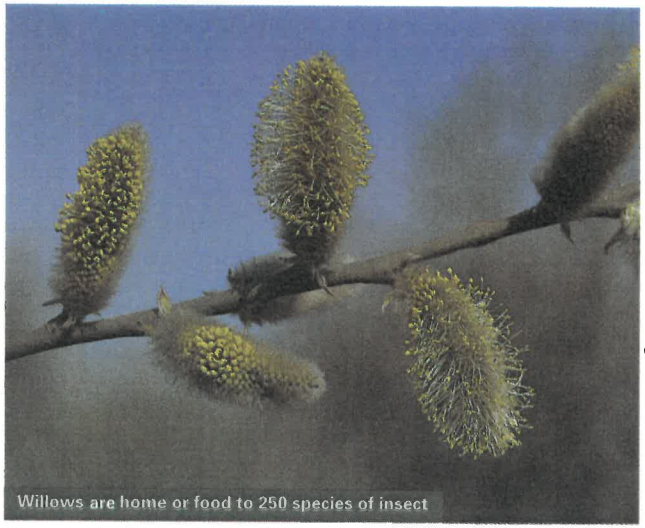
Shrubs

Buddleia is a sweet scented shrub that attracts butterflies such as the painted lady. If you plant one in your garden you can be certain to see several different sorts of butterflies – even if you live in the centre of town. But buddleia is also home for a vast range of other insects – aphids, hoverflies, bees, moths and flies – all of which make a meal for birds.

Other shrubs provide roosting and sheltering places for birds, as well as a ready supply of insects in spring and summer, and berries in autumn.

Trees

Willows are trees rich in insect life – 250 species of insects have been found sheltering among their leaves and branches. Other trees are home to vast numbers of insects – oak is by far the best with an average of 300 species, silver birch has 225 and poplar 100. Other beneficial trees that you can plant are rowan, alder, field maple, hazel and sycamore. Why not plant one of these trees in your garden if you have space? Willows are quick-growing, but need to be planted well away from your house because the roots can damage the foundations. Birches also grow quickly and some of the weeping varieties such as *Betula youngii* are suitable for very small gardens.



Willows are home or food to 250 species of insect

Harald Lange (Bruce Coleman Ltd)

Barberry	Buckthorn	Dogwood	Holly
Cotoneaster	Crab apple	Hawthorn	Privet
Firethorn	Guelder rose	Spindle	Wayfaring tree
Honeysuckle	Ivy	Climbing rose	Yew
Rowan	Cherry	Elder	

Flowers in your garden will provide food for butterflies such as the painted lady (below) and the red admiral (bottom) ▼

Many birds, such as this chiffchaff, are insect feeders ►

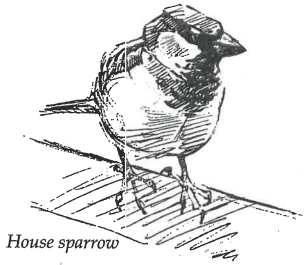
Paul Franklin (Oxford Scientific Films). Inset by M K Walker (RSPB)

Bob Glover (Bruce Coleman Ltd)

Flowers for insects

As well as adding colour to your garden, a herbaceous border stocked with a rich variety of plants will support a vast number of moths and other insects. These insects, and in late summer the seeds of the plants, will be eaten by a variety of birds. As an extra bonus, butterflies may be attracted by the brightly coloured flowers to feed on nectar.

Willow tit



House sparrow

Some flowers to attract insects and birds

Aubretia	Balsam	Candytuft
Clarkia	Cornflower	Cosmos
Evening primrose	Forget-me-not	Foxglove
Globe thistle	Godetia	Honesty
Ice plant *(Sedum)*	Larkspur	Lavender
Lobelia	Marjoram	Michaelmas daisy
Mignonette	Night scented stock	Petunia
Pinks	Primrose	Scabious
Snapdragon	Sunflower	Sweet rocket
Thyme	Valerian	Wallflower

Sunflowers are particularly attractive to finches that feed on the seeds ▸

W Layer (Oxford Scientific Films)

Bees will come to feed in foxglove flowers and in return will pollinate them ▸

Harald Lange (Bruce Coleman Ltd)

Peacock butterflies (below) need to feed on the nectar from flowers, while their caterpillars need nettles (bottom) ▾

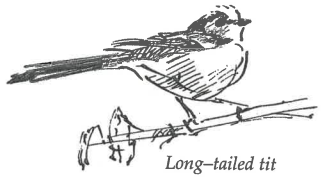
Greenfinch

Dr P Evans (Bruce Coleman Ltd). Inset by Roger Wilmshurst (RSPB)

Nettles

Leave a clump of nettles to grow in an otherwise unproductive, sunny spot – along a hedge or behind a garden shed. Many butterflies need nettles to lay their eggs on, red admirals, peacocks and small tortoiseshells for example. Some moth caterpillars also feed on nettles and many of them will in turn be eaten by the birds in your garden. Cut the nettles back regularly to encourage fresh young growth.

Kim Taylor (Bruce Coleman Ltd)



Long–tailed tit

Swift Picture Library

▲Putting nestboxes up will increase your chances of having nesting birds, such as robins, in your garden

Nestboxes

You can encourage more birds to live in your garden by providing plenty of places to nest. One way to do this is to put up nestboxes on walls, fences or trees. You can buy a nestbox from the RSPB or you can make one yourself. Different sorts of nestboxes are available which will attract different sorts of birds.

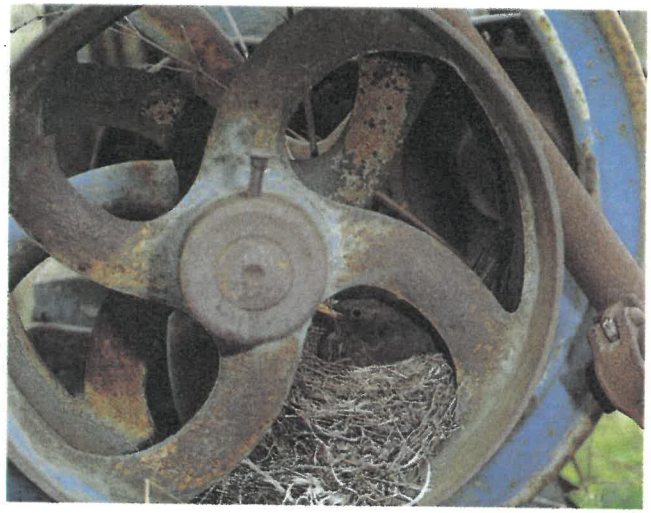
Site your nestbox in a quiet part of the garden where cats cannot easily reach it, for example, not on the top of a wall.

Unusual nest sites

Put an old jug, kettle or teapot in a shrub or tree (spout down for drainage) – robins have a reputation for using such artificial nest sites.

Leave a window open in your garden shed, or make a special entrance under the roof. Birds are great opportunists and a blackbird or song thrush may take the chance to raise young out of reach of cats. Pied wagtails will nest in all sorts of unusual places including a pile of stones or bricks.

Blackbirds will take advantage of undisturbed places to raise their young ▸



Allan G Potts (Bruce Coleman Ltd)

Changing habits

Most blackcaps migrate south in autumn and our wintering blackcaps are mainly winter visitors from central Europe. Their survival was probably low until some years ago when they started to feed at birdtables. Now more and more can be seen in winter feeding in our gardens.

Leave baby birds alone – the parent birds will probably not be far away ▸

Baby birds

If you find young birds in your garden that seem to be abandoned – leave them alone! In most cases the parent birds are not far away, probably searching for food, and they will return once you have gone. Only intervene if you are certain the young bird has been orphaned – raising a baby bird is a huge commitment.

Starlings

S C Porter (RSPB). Inset by Roger Wilmshurst (RSPB)

Chaffinches are one of many species of birds that nest in the cover of ivy

Roger Wilmshurst (RSPB)

Ivy

Ivy is a valuable addition to your wildlife garden. Dunnocks, chaffinches and blackbirds can nest safely hidden among the twining stems. The evergreen leaves provide shelter from the rain and cold, and insect food for small mammals and birds. The berries are a valuable source of food in winter when other supplies are running out. Peacock and tortoiseshell butterflies may hibernate in ivy for the winter.

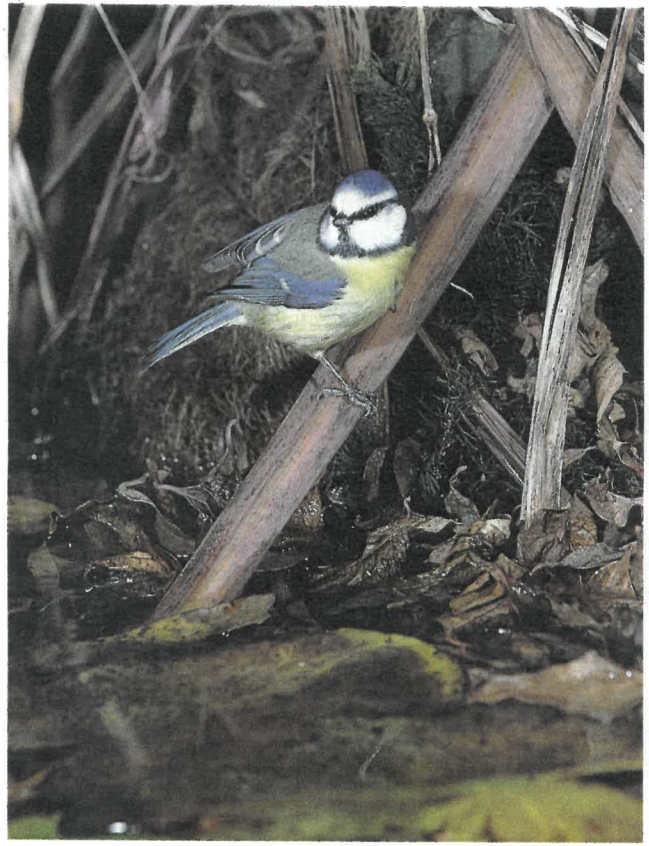
Grow ivy over a fence, wall or shed – you can let it cover a big area or keep it pruned back, as you wish. Contrary to common belief, ivy rarely harms vigorously growing trees.

George McCarthy (RSPB)

Dig a pond

A pond will attract a variety of interesting wildlife to your garden and provide water for birds to bathe in and drink. Even a sunken sink may attract frogs – put some stones in it so that frogs can get out and birds can perch to bathe and drink.

You can make a pond following these simple instructions. Any size will do, although the larger it is, the more diverse the community of animals and plants living in it will be.



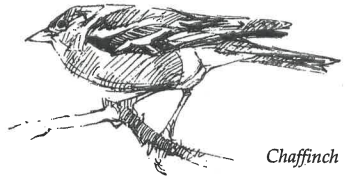
George McCarthy (RSPB)

Site your pond away from trees. The shade will stunt the growth of water plants, and autumn leaf fall will smother out many animals and plants.

Make sure the edges of the pool shelve gradually at one end so that birds and other animals of different sizes can safely reach the water to drink. If you make the margins irregular it will give you a greater area for waterside plants.

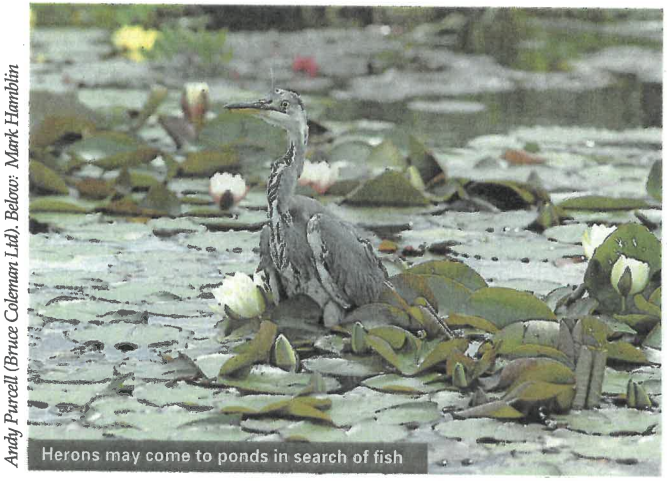
◂Ponds attract a variety of wildlife from frogs (above) to birds such as blue tits

Robin



Chaffinch

Making your pond



Andy Purcell (Bruce Coleman Ltd). Below: Mark Hamblin

Herons may come to ponds in search of fish

As with the rest of your garden, a variety of plants in and around your pool will provide food, shelter and breeding places for insects, birds and other animals. You should be able to buy these plants from a garden centre. Never uproot any wild plant to put in your garden – this is illegal. You should also be able to buy pond snails from a garden centre – they eat debris and help to keep the water clean. Never spray chemicals near the water – pond animals are very sensitive to many of them and will die, causing your pond to become stagnant very quickly.

Song thrush

REMEMBER, A WILDLIFE POND IS NOT IDEAL FOR EXOTIC FISH SUCH AS GOLDFISH, AS HERONS OR OTHER WILDLIFE CAN EASILY FEED ON THE FISH.

- Dig out the pond and line the hole with newspapers or fine sand.
- Line with thick plastic sheeting. To find out the width you need, add twice the greatest depth to the width of the pond. Similarly for the correct length, add twice the greatest depth to the pond length. Make sure the liner touches the pond bottom every where so it will not rip when filled with water.
- Trap the edges of the liner with stones. Do not let them overhang the water as this may trap frogs or toads. Fill the gaps between the stones with soil for waterside plants. Trim the liner after filling the pond.
- Let the pond fill with rainwater or fill it from a hose. Shovel some soil into it and one or two stones to act as shelters for pond animals.

Deni Bown (Oxford Scientific Films)

For details on organic gardening, contact the National Centre for Organic Gardening, Ryton-on-Dunsmore, Coventry CV8 3LG.

Controlling pests

With the increased use of chemicals in our countryside, many people now choose not to use them in their own gardens. The use of chemicals in a garden can pose a risk to wildlife, and may destroy beneficial insects and plants.

Worms

Worms are beneficial in providing aeration and drainage to the soil of lawns.

Slugs

Slugs and snails are taken by song thrushes in times of drought or hard weather.

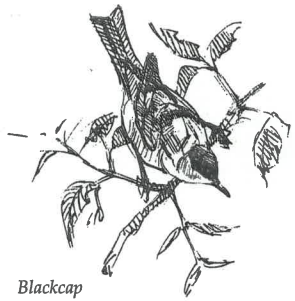
G Downey (RSPB)

Song thrushes are natural predators of snails, slugs and worms ▸

If you wish to remove slugs from your garden, sink a steep-sided container into the ground and fill it with a sweet liquid such as beer. A hollowed-out half orange placed open face down will also attract slugs. **Slug pellets contain dangerous chemicals and can be harmful to wildlife and pets.**

Alternatives to chemical control

- Encourage natural predators such as ladybirds, hover flies and beetles.
- Insects are important food for wildlife. For every pest there are usually at least two or three predators.
- Mulching, hoeing or removing the pest by hand may be options.
- Make sure that you do not bring plants which host pests into your garden.



Blackcap

Alternatives to peat

Goldfinch

If you buy peat for your garden, you are contributing to the destruction of one of the UK's rarest wildlife habitats, lowland raised peat bogs.

Good quality alternatives are now available so please choose them; and if your local garden centre does not stock alternatives, ask them to! Check also that pot plants are grown in peat-free material. Composting your garden and kitchen waste makes a great soil improver.

For further information on peat bogs and peat alternatives write to: RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL.

Martyn Chillmaid (Oxford Scientific Films)

Tawny owl

Beyond the garden

Roger Tidman

The waxwing is a rare winter visitor that may come into gardens in a search for berries

W S Paton (RSPB)

Hedgehog

Our precious countryside is under threat from development and agricultural changes. To tackle these threats, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds buys and manages nature reserves. Our reserves protect the jewels of our natural heritage and allow people to enjoy the countryside and wildlife.

C H Gomersall (RSPB)

Our countryside cannot be protected by nature reserves alone. The RSPB also fights damaging development, undertakes research into threatened species and habitats, and campaigns for changes in policy that affect wildlife and the countryside. One-fifth of our birds are marine, and the Society is also campaigning for a safer future for our seas.

The RSPB is the charity that takes action for wild birds and the environment. It has joined with bird and habitat conservation organisations worldwide to form a global partnership called BirdLife International. We believe that the beauty of birds and nature enriches the lives of many people, and that nature conservation is fundamental to a healthy environment on which the survival of the human race depends.

By subscribing to the RSPB you will receive *Birds*, the Society's quarterly full-colour magazine. You will also be able to visit over 100 RSPB nature reserves free of charge.

◂Strathbeg Nature Reserve

ASH/RSPB

For young people under 16 there is the RSPB Wildlife Explorers Club. Find out about birds and other wildlife, and have fun! RSPB Wildlife Explorers also receive their own magazine six times a year.

Garden bird equipment, bird food and a wide range of gifts are available in the RSPB's gift catalogue. Write to the address below if you would like a free copy.

FURTHER MEMBERSHIP DETAILS CAN BE OBTAINED FROM RSPB, THE LODGE, SANDY, BEDFORDSHIRE SG19 2DL, TEL 01767 680551

Great tit